

FURTHER PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

Dear Church Council and congregant:

The State of National Disaster declared by President Ramaphosa to deal with the Corona (Covid-19) virus has presented the church with an witness-opportunity to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth and to reach out to other people.

It is important, however, that we share some well-informed thoughts about this pandemic we are now facing. We experience that people have strong and diverse opinions about this pandemic. Despite the degree of the pandemic, we should keep the following in mind when addressing this issue:

- South Africa is a vulnerable country, due to poverty, unemployment and accompanying health such as Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS.
- We are also vulnerable because of the lack of medical resources. The amount of hospital beds and ventilators are just not enough if large numbers of people would fall ill at the same time.
- Statistics of countries that have already experience the outbreak clearly show that we could drastically reduce the spread and numbers, if we act immediately and drastically.

Principles

We recommend the following principles in dealing with the situation:

- Work with the approach of *"I do not want to infect anyone"*. It is better than the current situation where people are isolated, to stop the spreading of the virus. We believe that prevention is better than cure.
- Because of the incubation period no one knows if he/she is a carrier of this virus, and therefore a number of people could be infected without even being aware of it.
- We should live as if all of us have the virus! Physical contact with other people should be avoided at all times.
- Through this behaviour, we can act in a caring and serving way towards ourselves and others.

The reality of the Corona (Covid-19) virus calls us to redefine our understanding of mutual care and support, and we could express it as follows:

- Stay away from one another, except if it is absolutely necessary.
- Do not meet in groups, even if it is less than 100 people
- Keep on caring for one another and serving one another without unnecessary physical exposure
- If physical visits are necessary, do it in a responsible manner
- Pray for one another – even if you cannot be close to others
- We should continue to care for one another spiritually, e.g. through phone calls or text messages

New ways of serving others:

- Do not follow the current tendency to buy excess stock. This will only result in poorer, more needy people to suffer even more
- Do not stop your programmes of compassion and care – rather think of creative ways how you can still serve others without making unnecessary physical contact
- Do not withhold your financial contributions – indeed, this is a time to open our purses – poor people are more vulnerable and more dependent on financial assistance

- Many South Africans are reliant upon their daily/weekly/monthly income to survive. If you have people in your service, please keep on paying them, even though they may not be able to come and work.

What could congregations do?

- If possible, stop all types of church services and meetings – even if the numbers are below 100 people
- Make use of current communication methods within congregations (sms's, emails, whatsapps). Use these as tools of encouragement, sharing of valuable information and spiritual care
- Provide members with the right information with regard to the Coronavirus. Share the Government whatsapp line number with them: 060 012 3456
- Church councils need to find creative ways of being church. Utilise electronic platforms as far as possible. Provide members with liturgies, short messages, prayers and symbolic acts of worship
- Where and if possible, open up the church building during the week during specified times, where people can come for worship while sitting apart. See to it that a minister, an elder or deacon is present at all times, with a Liturgy (music, short message and prayers) that could be used repetitively.
- Offerings should be received in creative ways with the physical handling of monies minimised as far as possible. If EFT's not possible for some members, a central place should be provided where offerings could be handed in at suitable times. People need to be reminded of their responsibility and stewardship
- Visits to the sick – if not essential, encourage with a phone call, whatsapp or sms. Use the words: "I don't know whether I am a carrier of the virus, therefore, I am rather calling you..." If a visit to the sick is needed, keep it brief. Avoid physical contact at all times – to protect yourself and the person you visit.
- Church offices: Create timeslots when members can visit the church office. If possible, church members should be encouraged to contact the Office through emails, whatsapps and sms's. If an employee is not really needed at the office, that employee should be encouraged to work from home or the days at the office could be decreased to the minimum.
- Where Early Childhood Development programmes are run from church, ask the parents to keep their children at home. If this is not possible, divide the children into much smaller groups and create a space of education in a close-knitted environment. This should, preferably, be done at home, under supervision.